

My Trip on the “Revisit Korea Program”

By James M. Martino

When I returned from the “Revisit Korea Program” trip, I received an e-mail from a good friend, Rich May, of Hyde Park, New York, asking about it. Rich was a Navy man during the Korean War, and I got to know him through an appeal he put in *The Graybeards*.

Rich was asking for information from anyone on how and where his best friend, Marshall, had been killed in Korea, just nine days before the ‘Cease Fire’ was signed on 27 July 1953. He mentioned that Marshall was with my division, the 45th Infantry, and I had done a lot of research on the battle positions of the 45th. I knew from his unit and the date that Marshall was on Christmas Hill when he was KIA.

Just over a month before Marshall died, I had been in that general area of Bloody Ridge, Sandbag Castle, Heartbreak Ridge, and the Punch Bowl. I had taken a number of photos and even some 8mm movies. I made copies of the Combat Reports, still photos and the movies; and sent it all to Rich so he would know the type of fighting that was going on and the type of mountainous terrain in which Marshall was fighting. We have become good friends over the seven years since then.

I began a response to his e-mail; and then decided to expand it into a complete report on the trip my son Scott and I took for my Korean War buddies, family, friends and others who might be interested.

We both really enjoyed the trip to South Korea. The tour was extremely well planned by Historical Military Tours. Their guides, two retired officers and a Sgt. Major, were outstanding. Since we were there during the 57th anniversary of North Korea’s invasion of the South, we were included in a number of memorial services in which we honored the Korean war dead; and the Korean people and their government honored and thanked us for helping them to preserve their freedom. And what they’ve done with that freedom since 1953!

They have become the 11th largest economy in the world, and the United States’ 7th largest trading partner. There was nothing I recognized after we left Incheon Harbor. Seoul, which didn’t have a building over four stories high when I was there, is now a vast, major city with hundreds of 15- to 30- storied apartment, hotel and office buildings.

Department stores, shops, factories and restaurants abound, and the Han River through Seoul to the new International Airport at Incheon’s Harbor has 8-lane expressways on both sides, with many other expressways going off north and south along the way. These expressways were filled with cars and trucks, mostly made in Korea: Kias, Hyundais and Daewoos. There were some American cars, BMWs and Mercedes. Unlike socialist/communist Cuba, there were no junkers. They all looked new and well cared for.

With all this building and production, it is easy to understand why South Korea has become a leading power and a staunch ally

of America on the world stage. In contrast, the North Korean communist economy, by measure of their Gross Domestic Product, is somewhere well below 183rd, where the listing on the Internet stopped measuring it. Millions of their people have starved to death. Free, capitalist South Korea is thriving, while the socialist/communist North Korean economy can’t even feed its oppressed population.

Our group included 50 from America, 15 from Colombia, 12 from Greece and 9 from The Netherlands. All of us only had to pay our air fare to Korea. Everything else (Five-Star Lotte-World Hotel, daily tour buses and guides and all meals) was paid for by the 7.5-million member Korean War Veterans Association and the Korean government.

Each veteran who fought in Korea is entitled to one hosted revisit trip with his wife or one sibling. Since they started this program in 1975, the 25th anniversary of the North Korean invasion, they have hosted about 23,750 UN veterans from the 21 countries which sent troops to help them.

The first day we visited the DMZ, Outpost Dora that overlooks North Korea southwest of Panmunjom, laid a wreath at the new U.S. Monument, received a medal during a large “thank you” celebration at Kyungmin Christian College, and had dinner at the 2nd Infantry Division Compound.

On day two, we toured the Incheon Landing Operations Hall. They revere General MacArthur for successfully planning and leading that extremely difficult and dangerous amphibious invasion just three months after the North Koreans attacked, visited Freedom’s Park, and laid a wreath at the Colombian Monument. The Greek and Netherlands groups went separately to their countries’ monuments for wreath-laying ceremonies.

The third day we toured the Korean War Memorial, where many photographers gathered around us. The next day some of their photos made the front pages of the Seoul newspapers and the international edition of the English-language Herald Examiner, which is published by the New York Times. We then went on a tour of the newly restored Kyungbok Palace, originally built in the 1300s. The Sae Eden Presbyterian Church was our next stop, where we were honored in a huge auditorium packed with parishioners.

The fourth day we went to the National Cemetery, where 150,000 Korean soldiers are buried. We gathered at the shrine for a wreath-laying ceremony to honor those Korean heroes. We then traveled to the Jangehung Gymnasium for the 57th Commemoration Ceremony of the Korean War hosted by the Korean Armed Services and the Korean government. The main speaker was their Prime Minister, The Honorable Han, Duck Soo.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and a reception hosted by His Excellency, Roh, Moo Hyun, President of the Republic of Korea. At this reception, each veteran was awarded a special medal, the Proclamation for which read:



Revisit group at Colombian monument (left) and at DMZ (above)

It is our great honor and pleasure to express the everlasting gratitude of the Republic of Korea and our people for the service you and your countrymen have performed in restoring and preserving our freedom and democracy.

We cherish in our hearts the memory of your boundless sacrifices in helping us reestablish our Free Nation.

In grateful recognition of your dedicated contributions, it is our privilege to proclaim you an "AMBASSADOR FOR PEACE" with every good wish of people of the Republic of Korea. Let each of us reaffirm our mutual respect and friendship that they may endure for generations to come.

1,800,000 of us went to Korea during those three years of war. 36,574 didn't come home alive: 23,615 Killed in Action; 2,460 Died of Wounds; 4,817 Missing in Action-Declared Dead; 2,849 Captured-Declared Dead, 8 Missing-Presumed Dead; 2,825 Other Non-Hostile Deaths (Accidents, Illness). Of these 36,574 men, no remains were found of 8,126 of them to send home to their families. In addition, 103,284 men were wounded, some more than once.

The next morning, we boarded the Korean Air 747 for the 12-hour return flight to LAX.

As I said above, Scott and I both thought it was a great trip. I especially appreciated visiting with the wonderful Koreans. They are an extremely polite, highly intelligent, hard working and friendly people.

As an SFC with Regimental Headquarters back in 1952-53, I had some time available to travel around the Seoul area and meet the people. I admired them then for their hard work, and their polite and pleasant attitude, despite the hardship they had suffered with the war that, in the previous two years, had overrun their area four times.

Hundreds of thousands of their soldiers and families had been killed, tortured, wounded or taken prisoner and their homes destroyed; yet, they shook it off and kept on going. At that time, I attributed their amazing strength to the hard life they had led.

I knew that about 50% of their children either died at childbirth

or before they were six years old. Interestingly, the young Korean lady tour guide on our bus told us that it is their tradition Korean to have their largest birthday celebration on their first birthday, because so many of them in the past had not made it through their first year of life.

As I have light skin and a lot of damage from the sun, I've worn a flat-topped, wide-brimmed cowboy hat for years. When I sent for and received my medals from the Army about two years ago, I put the ribbons on that hat. When our American tour guides saw 'The Hat' the first night in Los Angeles, they said they'd use me at 6'1" and 'The Hat' as a rallying point for the group. Because of 'The Hat,' I was approached at a number of the monuments and museums by Koreans who wanted their picture taken with me:

At the Colombian Monument, a Korean gentleman approached for a picture and told me he served during the War as a KATUSA (Korean Attached To United States Army). My son took our picture, and the gentleman gave me his address in Inchon to send a print to him.

At the National War Monument, a group of little girls (9 or 10 years old) came up to me and my son, waving and saying "Thank you, Thank You" repeatedly, and wanting a picture with me. A group of boys wanted the same thing. They were with their teacher, so I got an e-mail address to send them copies.

At the National War Museum, a young man, his wife and two boys approached me for the same reason. He told me that he had served in the Korean Army from 1991 to 1993, and that he also was a KATUSA personnel. He wanted to take a picture of his two sons with me. He had his own camera, so I didn't get his address, but I have the picture, as Scott took one also.

No, we didn't see any of the old battle sites, as we were too busy with all the memorial ceremonies. The food was good, a mixture of Korean, Chinese and western. Usually, it was served buffet style so we could pick and choose. I skipped the octopus, and some similar delicacies.

*James M. Martino, 3088 Boeing Road
Cameron Park, CA 95682
(530) 677-0970, Mooney@sbcglobal.net*

APPLICATION FOR KVA SEOUL REVISIT TOUR

KVA (Seoul) Revisit Purpose: "To express the gratitude of the Korean Government towards Korean War Veterans who took part in the Korean War from June 25, 1950 to October 15, 1954."

Veteran's Personal History (Please type or print)

Last Name _____ First _____ MI _____ Date of Birth _____

KWVA Members# _____ Expiration Date _____

Companion Name/Relationship _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone # _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Veteran's Passport# _____ Expiration Date _____

Companion's Passport# _____ Expiration Date _____

NOTE: If you do not have a current valid passport or have just applied to KVA, write "applied for" on # line

Veteran's Military Biography

Branch of Service _____ Service Number _____

Period of Service in Korean War (month/year) from _____ thru _____

Unit Assignment _____ Location of Unit _____

Rank Achieved in Korea _____ Highest Rank Achieved while in Service _____

Personal Military Decorations for Valor _____

Veterans' Certification

I hereby certify that I have never previously accepted a KVA (Seoul) Revisit tour and that I am a member in good standing (or have applied) with the Korean War Veterans Association (KWVA).

Veteran's Signature _____ Date _____

Complete and mail this form along with a \$300 deposit per person (check, money order or Visa/MasterCard only) to Military Historical Tours. Payment in full is required for all applications submitted sixty days or less prior to departure.

Credit Card Authorization

I, _____ hereby authorize Military Historical Tours to make charges to my _____ credit card, Account#: _____ Expiration date: _____

in consideration for airline tickets and any other travel or transportation services or products as requested by me or authorized users of this credit card. Signature: _____

Mail To:

KWVA Revisit Korea Program Phone: 703-212-0695
c/o MILITARY HISTORICAL TOURS Fax: 703-212-8567
4600 Duke Street, Suite 420 E-mail: mht@miltours.com
Alexandria, VA 22304-2517 www.miltours.com

Background

The Korea Revisit program was begun by the Korean Veterans Association (KVA/Seoul) in 1975, the 25th anniversary year of the outbreak of the Korean War, to express their gratitude to veterans of the War and to show them the bountiful results of their sacrifices and devotion.

KVA's Eligibility Requirements

You are eligible if you are:

1. A veteran of the Korean War and /or a war correspondent of any of the 21 nations which came to assistance of the Republic of Korea between 25 June 1950 and 15 October 1954.

2. An immediate family member of one who was killed in action in the Korean War.

Note: You are permitted to take a spouse or one immediate descendent with you to Korea. The family member must be lodged in the same hotel room with you in Korea.

Privileges Accorded Veterans by the KVA, Seoul

1. Hotel accommodations (two persons per room), meals, tours, and transportation, while in Korea for six days and five nights.

2. Tours of Seoul and vicinity. The visits are to Panmunjom, North Korean Invasion Tunnels, Korea War Memorial Monument, National Cemetery, National Museum, Korean Folk Village, Korean War Museum,

plus other cultural/industrial facilities and activities in the Seoul area. Other tours of battle sites and/or Incheon may be made through the local tour guide.

3. A special reception and dinner hosted by the President of the Korean Veterans Association (KVA) during which the Korea War Medal and Certificate of Ambassador for Peace will be awarded to each veteran who has not received it before.

Sundry Notes

1. The KVA Revisit Program privileges are provided for scheduled groups only.

2. Participants are required to have a valid passport: a visa is not required for visits of 15 days or fewer in Korea.

3. KVA/Seoul is not responsible for any loss of, or damage to, personal or other items, medical expenses, injuries, or loss of like due to any accident of whatever nature during the revisits. Trip cancellation insurance is available and highly recommended.

4. Transportation costs to and from Korea will be borne by each person who participates in the program.

5. Applications will be received/accepted on a "first-come, first-served" basis.

Note: *If you have previously accepted an official KVA/Seoul Revisit tour from any sponsoring association or group, you are NOT eligible to participate again. The reason is that so many veterans have not gone before so they get the "first right of return."*

Because former Revisit Program participants have their name in the KVA/Seoul's computer database, please do not try to beat the system. If your name is rejected because of prior participation, all of us will be embarrassed and an eligible Korea War veteran might miss the opportunity to participate.

6. If you want to use your frequent flier miles-or other "free" transportation, you will be charged an administrative service fee of \$300 per person.

Caution: Not traveling with KWVA group air contract can result in much higher post-tour costs to China and other Pacific location.

Note: Should you desire to have a single room or take additional family or friends with you, this can be arranged for an additional cost. Any such requests must be made in writing.

Korean War MIAs Identified

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of three U.S. servicemen, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

They are Sgt. Donald C. Trent, of Crab Orchard, W. Va.; Cpl. Robert K. Imrie, of Randolph, Mass.; and Cpl. Samuel Wirrick of Lancaster, Pa.; all U.S. Army. Imrie [was] buried Monday, July 23, 2007 at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.; and Trent and Wirrick will be buried at Arlington in October.

Representatives from the Army met with the next-of-kin of these men in their hometowns to explain the recovery and identification process and to coordinate interment with military honors on behalf of the Secretary of the Army.

In late November 1950, these soldiers were members of the 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, then operating south of the Chongchon River in North Korea. Their regiment's positions came under

heavy attack by Chinese forces and the 2nd Battalion was forced to withdraw to positions near the town of Kujang. On Nov. 27, Imrie was killed in action, and Trent and Wirrick were reported missing.

In 2000, a joint U.S.-Democratic People's Republic of Korea-Korean People's Army team, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), excavated a mass burial believed to contain the remains of U.S. soldiers who died near Kujang. The team found human remains, Wirrick's identification tag and other material evidence associated with U.S. Army infantry equipment.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used mitochondrial DNA and dental comparisons in the identification of the remains. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420.

Now Hear This:

All comments concerning, or contributions for publication in The Graybeards should be sent to Art Sharp, Editor, 152 Sky View Dr., Rocky Hill, CT 06067 or emailed to: sharp_arthur_g@sbcglobal.net

Death Notice of a Member of KWVA

The following notice is submitted for publication:

Name of deceased _____

Date of death _____

Department/Chapter _____

Address _____

Army Navy Marine Corps Air Force Coast Guard

Other _____

Primary Unit of service during Korean War

Submitted by _____

Relationship to deceased _____

Send to: Membership, P.O. Box 22857, Alexandria, VA 22304-9285